

September 21, 2021

To the Gallatin County School Board:

My name is Linda Webster and I am the speech language pathologist at the Upper Elementary School. First, I want to thank you for extending the mask requirement for the next two weeks. The COVID-19 cases are certainly high enough to warrant it, especially when combined with the more contagious Delta variant. Secondly, I would like to ask you to consider extending the mask requirement for kindergarten students and older past these two weeks, at least until cases in the county are in the yellow. We have so many vulnerable students, families, and staff, who are currently being protected by everyone wearing masks. Numerous research studies have proven the effectiveness of mask wearing and slowing the spread of COVID-19. We have already had to use two of our NTI days the first three weeks of school due to the number of staff in quarantine. Those numbers will increase if the protection of masks is removed. Yes, wearing masks is uncomfortable and inconvenient. It has added a significant layer of complexity to my job in particular. However, I would much rather work around these difficulties than not be able to see my students at all because they or I are sick or quarantined. I want, and our students need, to be at school in person as much as possible. One of the simplest actions we can take to increase the probability of staying in school is continuing to wear masks when the transmission rate is high. I understand that not everyone is willing to get vaccinated and the school board is not ready to mandate vaccinations. As an alternative, wearing masks is a simple and effective step in reducing transmission and keeping our students and staff safe. Thank you for your time and consideration.